

The Research Thesis

Module: 2FTV7H1

The Scandinavian cultural influences on Ingmar Bergman's
characters, narrative space and acoustics from the 1950s to 1970s

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Abstract

Ingmar Bergman is one of the most brilliant cerebral auteurs in the history of moving images. This dissertation aims at understanding the cultural discourse of Scandinavia which particularly influenced his oeuvre. Bergman's complex authorial identity, which first and foremost is resultant of his originality and ideas also must have drawn inspirations from the cultural past and present that his work emerged from. The cultural elements of Scandinavia can be broadly categorised into artistic culture and social culture. Artistic cultural influences include Scandinavian theatre, cinema, folk culture and local history. Works of Nordic artists like Ibsen, Strindberg and Dreyer are analysed, in addition to the contribution of the intellectual mentors in his life who inspired him. As for the social culture, religion of Northern Europe is considered, along with its probable influence on his upbringing. Also, the social forces associated with feminism, Scandinavian women's individual freedom, equality and generic image are examined. There is a comparative discussion of Bergman's *mise-en-scène* of the three decades starting from the 1950s. His usage of Bach and other classical music and the overall use of acoustics are explored. Finally, in addition to the aforementioned factors, Bergman's Swedish identity and its effect is discussed in order to summarise the cultural influences on the characters, space, and sound in his films of the 1950s to 1970s.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction	2
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Chapter 2

The Scandinavian Artistic Culture and Bergman	5
2.1 Theatre - The Major Influence	5
2.2 Film Influences	16
2.3. Influence of Scandinavian Folk Culture and History	19

Chapter 3

Family, Religion and Feminism:

Scandinavian Social Culture and Bergman's work	22
3.1 Religion and Family: Their Effect on the Rebel Named Bergman	22
3.2 Politics, Class and Feminism: Subtle Motivations	27

Chapter 4

The Women, Space and Sound of Bergman's Moving Images:

The Nordic Effect	33
4.1 The Women and Society of Bergman	33
4.2 The 'Bergmanian' Space	36
4.3 The Melody and the Absence of it – The Acoustics of Bergman	38

Chapter 5

Being Bergman: The One-Man Cultural Industry of Sweden	43
5.1 "I'm so 100 Percent Swedish"	43
5.2 Conclusion	46

Filmography	48
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Television Documentaries/ Programmes	50
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Bibliography	51
---------------------	-----------

Online References	53
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Chapter 1

Introduction

"More persuasively than any other director, Bergman has mapped out the geography of the individual psyche — its secret yearnings and its susceptibility to memory and desire."

~ Michiko Kakutani on Ingmar Bergman, 1983

Ingmar Bergman is one of the most celebrated names in the history of cinema and authorship. The Swedish screenwriter-director has gifted the world with numerous critically acclaimed cinematic works, "some of the most startling images in the history of the cinema"(Wood, 1969: 7) which also became the source of inspiration for many famous directors like Woody Allen, Andrei Tarkovsky, Ang Lee, Stephen Spielberg and Lars von Trier (TV Documentary: *Trespassing Bergman*, 2013).

To conduct a narrative analysis and psychoanalysis of Bergman's oeuvre is tempting but not new. So I have decided to rather look at some other influences which might have left its mark on Bergman's body of work. This dissertation aims at understanding the cultural discourse of Scandinavia which particularly influenced Bergman's world of moving images; especially his characters, spatiality and sound. Bergman is above-all recognised for his complex authorial identity, which first and foremost is obviously born from his own creativity and personal reflection but also must be drawn from and indeed add to the cultural past and present that his work emerged from.

In order to discuss the Scandinavian influence on Bergman's characters, narrative space and music, I have broadly classified the cultural discourse of the Northern European region into two broad categories: 'artistic culture' and 'social culture'. Among the artistic cultural influences, attention is specifically paid to Scandinavian theatre, cinema and folk culture. As for social culture, the most prominent aspect is the religion of Northern Europe and the social consequences, along with the social issues associated with feminism and gender exploitation.

To grasp the artistic cultural tradition, I have principally looked into works of Nordic playwrights like Henrik Ibsen and Johan August Strindberg; filmmaker and theatre-director Alf Sjöberg, Victor Sjöström and Carl Theodor Dreyer. Furthermore, I have looked into the relationships between him and some mentor-figures in his life. The effect of religion is understood by exploring his upbringing and the austere Christian traditions in Scandinavian society. Among Bergman's filmic works in 1950s to 1970s, I am particularly interested in *Summer with Monika* (1953), *The Seventh Seal* (1957), *Wild Strawberries* (1957), *The Magician* (1958), *The Virgin Spring* (1960), *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961), *Winter Light* (1962), *The Silence* (1963), *Persona* (1966), *Shame* (1968), *Passion of Anna* (1969), *Cries and Whispers* (1972), *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973) and *Autumn Sonata* (1978). These films are rich with expressionism and self-consciousness; also these are helpful examples to support my hypothesis. The approach for research has been textual analysis,

exploring Bergman's interviews (both book and TV interviews) and informed study of the selected films.

This dissertation has discussed the probable inspirations behind the 'Bergmanian' characters, narrative spaces and music in light of those cultural aspects. The women in Bergman's work and the subtle socio-political hints in his otherwise apolitical films are mentioned. The noticeable difference of the spaces in the mise-en-scène of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s and the probable influence behind this are analysed, so is the use of acoustics in his works. Finally the question of a Swedish national identity is examined and I theorised my hypothesis by bringing all the influential catalysts together in a coherent fashion.

Chapter 2

The Scandinavian artistic culture and Bergman

2.1 Theatre – The major influence

"Theatre ought to be the encounter of human beings and human beings
and nothing more. All else is distracting."

~ Bergman cited in Marker and Marker, 1992: 190

Bergman was had a split-loyalty to two art forms. One is cinema, which he characterised as, "the costly, exacting mistress", and the other is theatre which he lovingly described as "the faithful wife". Being one of the most famous Swedish theatre-directors of all time, he directed some great works on stage. Some famous Scandinavian playwrights had their vivid artistic influence on Bergman, most noteworthy being August Strindberg and Henrik Ibsen.

It is often commented by scholars that Johan August Strindberg has had a distinct effect on modern drama. It is possible to find his influence on personalities like Shaw, O'Neill, Ionesco, Genet, and Williams (DePaul, 1965: 630). 'Strindbergian' characters found their way to Bergman's work as well. He got introduced to the world of Strindberg as early as the age of 12. It was *A Dream Play*, directed by notable theatre personality Olof Molander. He watched this "night after night, hidden in the proscenium tower" (Bergman, 1988: 33) and the narrative and the performance of the actors left a long-lasting impression on his mind. In college, he wrote his BA thesis on Strindberg.

When he was appointed the director of the City Theatre of Helsingborg in 1944, he became the youngest theatre manager in Europe. There he produced Strindberg's plays, which eventually helped to re-establish the old glory of that theatre (DePaul, 1965: 622). In 1945, *The Pelican* by Strindberg was his first production at the Malmö Municipal Theatre as well. Throughout his lifetime, Bergman directed sixteen plays by Strindberg, many of which were produced multiple times. Some of the important works are *A Dream Play*, *The Ghost Sonata*, *The Father*, *Playing with Fire*, *Erik XIV*, *To Damascus*, and *Miss Julie*. *The Father* staged in 1941 was a disaster financially, but this Strindberg play remained an important one in his life. This is because after this play's direction, in the summer of 1943 Bergman finally decided to abandon his university studies and, in spite of his parent's protests, devote himself to become a professional theatre director (Bergman official website).

The Father (1911) is one of the oldest Swedish films, which is based on Strindberg's play of the same name. The film-adaptation of Strindberg's *There Are Crimes and Crimes* was made in Germany in 1917 and then again in Sweden in 1928. According to DePaul, Strindberg's dramatic works furnished directors with ready-made materials. The characters and their seriousness, their human issues came up with dimensions which could be efficiently and beautifully adapted to film, if handled properly.

In *Inferno*, Strindberg wrote: "You relive the life you have lived, from your birth to the day that is. You suffer again all the sufferings you have endured, you drink again all the cups of bitterness you have so often drained."

Bergman's film *Wild Strawberries* (1957) seems inspired by these words and the thematic structure of the film is based on *A Dream Play*. DePaul remarks that the similarities are quite evident: for example, the dream set-up in which Borg receives his honorary degree in the Cathedral of Lund and the one in which he is examined, are similar to the play (1965: 627-628).

It is not difficult to find a handful of other Bergman movies which have shadows of Strindberg's works. *The Seventh Seal* (1957) has its inspiration drawn from Strindberg's *Saga of the Folkungs*. *The Stronger*, the 1889 play is an example of dramatic monologue where Miss Y just silently listens to her rival Mrs. X's criticism and burst of revelations; it is an obvious thematic motivation to Alma's monologue to the silent Elizabeth in *Persona* (1966) (Cowie, 1982: 45).

In the last of his autobiographical novels, *Alone*, Strindberg writes "In my dreams my inner being is mirrored..." . Bergman's take on dreams and reality also sounds similar, "My films are never meant to be reality. They are mirrors, fragments of reality, almost like dreams" (Bergman cited in Cowie, 1982: 46). Both Strindberg and Bergman mentioned the concept of living life like a dream, often not their own. In *The Pelican*, Strindberg's characters imagine that they are sleepwalking and are horrified at the thought of waking up to reality. In Strindberg's *The Dance of Death*, the captain interferes in the fate of others, "to suck interest from their lives, to order and arrange things from them, since his own life is of absolutely no interest to him"(Cowie, 1982: 45) Again in Bergman's *Shame*, Eva says "Sometimes everything seems just like a dream.

It's not my dream, it's somebody else's. But I have to participate in it. How do you think someone who dreams about us would feel when he wakes up? Feeling ashamed?" I believe this perception of Strindberg and Bergman can be seen as an analogy about drawing artistic inspiration from others; from the world around.

Bergman was inspired by Strindberg, as DePaul puts it, both "by inheritance and inclination" (1965: 622). Bergman himself remarked that "Strindberg's language burned into my flesh" (Bergman cited in Steene, 1998: 189). In his autobiography Bergman discusses in detail Strindberg's personal life, the turmoil of his marriage and how all the loneliness, breakdown and pain affected his writing. For Bergman, the characters of *A Dream Play* and *To Damascus* spoke the language of Strindberg's own self and evidently it also inspired the director of that play as he thought of creating the most appropriate set, "manoeuvring the lament" of the characters, expressing the feeling of being shipwrecked or seeing a miracle – all in a minimalist set-up of a theatre (Bergman, 1988: 38-39). Bergman most certainly identified with and understood Strindberg as a person and hence his works. So I agree with Steene's comment that Strindberg was Bergman's 'mentor', but Bergman was also his 'interpreter', rather a 'transformer' of Strindberg's heritage (1998: 190).

In the 1890s, the ideas of Neo-Romanticism were influential in Scandinavia: human rationality is vulnerable; beneath the surface the instincts operate and thus make human behaviour unpredictable. The ambiguous fascination about the elementary life forces influenced eminent Scandinavian cultural icon like

Henrik Ibsen deeply (Aarseth, 1998: 5-6). I would take the liberty to say that this fascination about the romantic view of life was somehow transferred into Bergman as he went through Ibsen's work and produced them, almost 50 years after their creation. The comment by Bergman confirms my view, "I find the joy of life in the hard and cruel battles of life; and to be able to add to my store of knowledge, to learn something, is enjoyment to me"(Bergman cited in Aarseth, 1998: 5).

The characters of Nora and Torvald from Ibsen's *A Doll's House* are somewhat, though not in their entirety, similar to Johan and Marianne in *Scenes From a Marriage* (1973), as we can clearly see that though they have an apparently happy and fulfilling relationship, under the thin surface it is quite the contrary. Only Ibsen's "life-lies" (termed in his play *The Wild Duck*) binds a broken marriage together. The strained chemistry, the thin blurred line where one understands another and does not, the clash of loyalty and freedom all are portrayed wonderfully in Ibsen's plays. This question of honesty in the relationship between men and women stayed with Bergman and was reflected in his works like *Shame* (1968), *Scenes from a Marriage* and *Passion of Anna* (1969). So did the "intimate play" induced by Ibsen's writing. *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler* and *Ghosts* had the one-to-one emotional encounter among the actors and Bergman instructed the actors and arranged the stage design in such way so that the mise-en-scène closed in; "its closed, even claustrophobic room seems almost to shrink in the course of the action" (Swanson, 1998: 207). This description is extremely familiar when we think of especially *Persona* and to some extent *The Silence* (1963) and *Cries and Whispers* (1972). Swanson

observes that in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* stage production, towards the end of the play the stage is to be stripped bare — the immense space as if swallows the actors and physically signifies the emptiness in the characters' lives.

Danish author and Lutheran pastor, Kaj Munk wrote couple of anti-Nazi plays, among them is a medieval play *Niels Ebbesen* about Danes fights against Germans, but the parallel to the contemporary Nazi Germany was unambiguously recognisable. While no other Swedish stage dared to produce it, Bergman directed it in 1943 at the Royal Dramatic Theatre; he later mentioned that he was so absorbed in the directorial procedures that he was completely unaware of any possible risk associated with it (Bergman official website). Another Danish playwright, Carl Erik Soya served a prison term during Denmark's Nazi occupation for his novel *A Guest*. In 1944, Bergman directed the play by Soya named *When the Devil Makes an Offer*. Looking into the characters and set-up, we can understand why he chose to produce the play: a "medieval play in modern attire"; its symbolic figures were "close to Bergman's own liking" (Bergman official site).

From 1942 to 1993, Bergman himself wrote and staged eight plays. Among them *Death of Punch*, staged in 1942, is about an actor who unexpectedly gets a visit from two men dressed in black, who turn out to be the messengers of death. The actor is forced to dance on the table of a bar by others (Cowie, 1982: 23). This visual composition reminds us of a similar misfortune of Jof in *The Seventh Seal* (1957). *The Day Ends Early*, staged in 1947, deals with the man's relationship to the devil. Bergman wrote and produced *Wood Painting* in 1954 and 1955, the play which is the forefather of *The Seventh Seal*. Then

there was a distinct gap in his own writing of dramaturgy for almost 20 years. Given the frequency of films he made during that time, it can be inferred that this hiatus is probably because of the time invested in writing film scripts. The last play named *The Last Cry*, both written and directed by him, came years later in 1993.

Bergman has artistic similarity with another Bergman; the writer and playwright Hjalmar Bergman. Bengt Forslund suggests that both Bergmans are seemingly fascinated by the concept of a clown - an evil genius who casts their shadow on over people and stains their lives (Forslund cited in Cowie, 1982: 46). The central character of Ingmar Bergman's *The Magician's* has strong resemblance to that of the 1930 film-novel *The Clown* by Hjalmar Bergman. Once Bergman denoted himself as the tightrope walker; he expressed his willingness to jump into a disaster if the audience demands so. This imagination is so figuratively similar to the sequence of *The Clown*, Jac, who "squeezes his art out of his own fear" (Cowie, 1982: 46) as Jac's best friend, a tightrope walker, falls to his death while performing. The clown-concept stayed with Bergman, as many years later we find another sinister joker-figure —interestingly, female — as the product of hallucinations of the protagonist in his TV movie *In the Presence of a Clown* (1997).

Lastly, the discussion of influence of playwrights on Bergman would be incomplete if Molière is not mentioned, even though he was not of Scandinavian descent. Bergman admitted that he, a "village genius from Sweden"(1988:163), at the age of thirty one, first watched the performance of

The Misanthrope by Molière at the Comédie Française and the effect was magical and instantaneous, as the "people on the stage stepped through my senses into my heart.... Molière stepped into my heart to remain there for the rest of my life." (Bergman, 1988:163) Later, he staged *The Misanthrope* multiple times, along with *The School For Wives*, *Dom Juan* (both in Sweden and Germany) and *Tartuffe* (in Germany). Apart from other influences, it indicates that humour is an underestimated aspect of Bergman's work, even though he made comedies like *Waiting Women* (1952) and *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955) which were well-received by audience. Also, it indicates that a formal interest in the structure and form of a play (or film) was important to him.

Bergman went to live in Gothenburgh as he was appointed as the director at Gothenburgh City Theatre in 1946. There he met theatre-director Torsten Hammarén. As a short-tempered young man, in the beginning Bergman was smitten by Hammarén's calm but firm attitude towards him, but slowly they struck up a close acquaintance and from 1946 to 1949 Hammarén had been a mentor of Bergman. In Bergman's own language, "...I at once appointed him in my heart the father-figure I had lacked since God had abandoned me. He took on the rôle and played conscientiously during the years I stayed in his theatre" (Bergman, 1988: 151). Bergman remembers with gratitude that from him he has learnt the important basics of good direction. For example: staging must be clear and direct without any haziness in emotion and intention; the communication between actors and audience should be lucid; there should be contradiction, but that should be intentional; "Events on the stage must reach

the spectator at every moment" (Bergman, 1988: 152). Hammarén's excellent understanding with the actors brought out the freedom and spontaneity in them and that was prominent in Hammarén's stage productions. Bergman mentioned it as a valuable learning experience. Also, it is Hammarén who first pointed out to the young director that he needed to draw sketches and notes for the set in order to have a clear idea of the set, well prepared beforehand (Bergman, 1988: 153).

Bergman worked with Alf Sjöberg, who was one of the most celebrated figures in Swedish cultural industry during Bergman's time. Sjöberg directed both theatre and film director and was senior to Bergman. They shared a colourful relationship as colleagues; sometimes they had "violent disagreements, both artistic and personal", but the mutual understanding and respect was there (Bergman, 1988: 197).

Bergman held the theatre production of director Olof Molander in high regard and highly praised his productions like *A Dream Play*, *To Damascus*, *The Saga of the Folkungs* and *The Ghost Sonata*. L. Marker and F.J Marker observe that Molander's pioneering production of *A Dream Play* established a lucid undertone of resignation and desolation in the nature of the dreamer, which was, if one may say so, very Swedish. Furthermore, Molander's projection of the dramaturgy was of a surrealistic taste or 'fantastic realism'. Both of the characteristics influenced Bergman (1992: 62). In his autobiography, Bergman also described that he was tensed about how to improve over Molander. Given that Bergman's own productions of these plays were highly acclaimed, we can

assume that this healthy competitive air in Swedish theatre-world made Bergman efficiently improvise and innovate.

In his theatre ventures, Bergman often used to make interesting changes in the original plays and had a brilliant foresight about the way the audience would react to a particular kind of treatment. The actors were part of this treatment; Bergman's actors had the most vital position in the whole performance, both literally and figuratively. He placed the action in the focal point, the area of the stage where he felt that the actors would have the greatest effect on the audience (Bergman official website). Some of the actors with whom he worked in theatre also worked in his films and vice versa. For example, Gunner Björnstrand, one of Bergman's regular leading film actors in the 1950s and 1960s, also had theatre exposure and first worked with Bergman in his 1941 production of Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata*. Gunnel Lindblom, who acted in numerous Bergman movies like *The Seventh Seal*, *Wild Strawberries*, *The Virgin Spring*, *The Silence* etc. was involved in theatre as well; Bergman produced the play *Paradise Place*, written by Lindblom in 1977 (Bergman, 1988: 84). Ingrid Thulin, one of the prominent characters in Bergman's *Winter Light* (1963), *The Silence* and *Cries and Whispers*, was trained at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm. Max Von Sydow, the leading man of Bergman-house, worked with him in notable stage works like *Peer Gynt* in 1957. In him Bergman had full trust after directing him in *The Seventh Seal* (Marker and Marker, 1992: 186). In 1958, Sydow again gave a critically acclaimed performance as a quixotic man in Bergman's adaption of Molière's *The Misanthrope*. Sydow was also a fellow member of the Royal Dramatic

Theatre and a colleague of Thulin. The contribution of actors were integral part of his work, be it the theatre or film. However, that was not so in his early days as a theatre director. One of his actors of that time, Birger Malmsten remembers "he directed the play holding a hammer in his hand, and he threw it from time to time at the young actors"(Malmsten cited in Cowie, 1982: 24). But this dictator-like attitude mellowed as he implemented Hammarén's advice to be open towards his actors' suggestions and also became more self-assured. Liv Ullman, Bibi Andersson, Björnstrand and Sydow (with whom Bergman mainly worked from the 1950s and the 1960s), fondly recall that how he used to let them understand and perform as per their ideas. This creative collaboration surely enriched Bergman's body of work.

In *The Magic Lantern* book, Bergman mentions one of his closest friends, renowned Swedish theatre critic Herbert Grevenius. Bergman acknowledged with gratitude that he also played as a mentor during Bergman's early career. It is him who taught Bergman "a certain orderliness of thought" (1988: 156-157), how to live with the tormenting reviews and approach to correct certain mediocrity or loopholes in a production.

Considering the script of the Bergman movies, the display of pure human emotion and the reflective -- often argumentative dialogues in his films are a magnificent mix of real-life experiences and derivatives of his theatre-education. Lastly, in some of his films, we even see the physical presence of a stage as part of the narrative. In *The Seventh Seal* the artist group performs on-stage; in *Smiles of a Summer Night* the protagonist Fredrik Egerman goes to a

theatre to watch the performance of his old flame; in *Through a Glass Darkly* Martin produces and acts a Shakespeare-ish play written by him; in *The Silence* Anna finds herself witnessing a couple having sexual intercourse inside a theatre; in *Persona* Elizabeth suddenly becomes silent in the middle of a performance on-stage. The enormous importance of stage in Bergman's artistic enterprise can be understood from these imageries.

Hence, we see that the majority of Bergman's stage productions were based on works of famous Scandinavian dramatists and of his own. Shakespeare and Molière's works were important to Bergman, nevertheless the Scandinavian playwrights "had an enormous influence, not only for his work in the theatre, but also for his artistic output in general." (Ingmar Bergman official website) Also, the Swedish theatre personalities like Molander, Hammarén, and Sjöberg and his talented Swedish actors contributed highly in his artistic life to elevate the quality of his opus.

2.2 Film influences

"To me, it was the beginning. I was overcome with a fever that has never left me. The silent shadows turned their pale faces towards me and spoke in inaudible voices to my most secret feelings. Sixty years have gone by and nothing has changed; the fever is the same."

~ Bergman about his first introduction to cinema at the age of six, *The Magic Lantern*,

1988: 14

Alf Sjöberg, as previously mentioned, was an important figure in the Swedish film industry. Earlier in 1944, Bergman wrote the screenplay of *Torment*/

Frenzy for Sjöberg to direct. He worked closely with Sjöberg in this film as the assistant director. Again, in 1956, He wrote *Last Pair Out* for Sjöberg. Sjöberg was also one of the pioneer directors in early Swedish television, the industry in which later Bergman was also involved.

In Bergman's own language, meeting renowned Swedish actor-screenwriter-director Victor Sjöström was a "tremendous personal experience". In an interview he described how deeply he was moved by Sjöström's work. At the age of 12 or 13, Bergman first met Sjöström through his film *The Phantom Carriage* (1921) and it left a deep impression on him. What moved him most was the great cinematographic power of the exposition of the movie (TV Programme: Bergman on Sjöström). Later, when Bergman started working as a director and was shooting his first feature film *Crisis*, Sjöström came and gave some wise suggestions about filmmaking to a greenhorn like him, while "holding on to the back of my neck" (Bergman, 1988: 69). Much later, Sjöström acted in Bergman's two movies, as the conductor in *To Joy* (1950) and as the protagonist in *Wild Strawberries* (1957). On Sjöström's performance in *Wild Strawberries*, Bergman reflected, "Never before or since have I experienced a face so noble and enlightened. And yet this was nothing more than a piece of acting in a dirty studio" (Bergman official website).

Bergman was appointed as a film director in the 1940s at Svensk Filmindustri, which was one of the biggest Swedish film production houses of that time. But Svensk Filmindustri "kicked out"(Bergman, 1988: 154) Bergman after the commercial failure of *Crisis*. It was Loren Marmstedt, an enthusiastic film

producer who believed in Bergman's worth and Bergman remembers him in his memoir with gratitude. He states that Marmstedt lived and fought for a film from script to release and: "It was he who taught me how to make films" (Bergman, 1988: 154).

The Scandinavian cinema-influence on Bergman can't be complete without discussing Carl Theodor Dreyer's work. Dreyer was the most famous Danish film director of his time and is still remembered with reverence about his outstanding contribution in Scandinavian cinema. In Bergman's composition we find the minimalist style of Dreyer. It is mainly based on, apart from the bare and confined landscapes, the consistent and conscious use of close-ups, "which betrays the influence of Dreyer's modernism" (Kovács, 2007:161- 162). Dreyer's filmic style, unlike the other renowned modernistic auteurs like Bresson and Antonioni, was very expressively minimalist. However, I would contradict Kovács when he says that Bergman's use of close-up is kind of new style in minimalism, because I believe that Dreyer already did that in his works. *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) is perhaps the best example of this expressive minimalism with the intense use of close-up of Renée Jeanne Falconetti (as Joan of Arc) and others. The immensely expressive face of Falconetti leaves a lasting impression on the audience's mind and needless to say we find this same usage of facial expression and filling the cinematic space with close-up in almost all Bergman movies from the late 1950s to the 1960s. In *Passion of Joan of Arc*, we see the agony in Joan when it seems she has been abandoned by God to her fate, which is not much different from the pain of Father Tomas in the face of God's silence in *Winter Light*. Dreyer's films are

stylistically austere; films like *Ordet* question social stigma and religious rigidity and deals with symbolism, which is both theme-wise and visually similar to some of the closed-situation dramas by Bergman. The witch-burning scene of *The Seventh Seal* can be compared to a similar scene in Dreyer's *Day of Wrath*, nevertheless "if this is a conscious reference, Bergman himself has never mentioned it" (Bergman official website). Apart from the similarity in modernistic visual imagery, the strong religious themes, especially as linked to northern European religious culture, link both directors.

2.3 Influence of Scandinavian Folk Culture and History

Regarding his grandmother, Bergman fondly recalls "she was in every way my best friend" (Bergman cited in Cowie, 1982: 13). She used to stay in Uppsala, Sweden and in his young age Bergman spent quite some time there. Now as Cowie puts it, Uppsala is the city with perhaps the richest history in Scandinavia. It is frequently mentioned in Icelandic-Norwegian sagas as being of vital significance with respect to religion and politics. The city consists of old castles, towers and churches and many historical anecdotes are associated with the nooks and corners of the city. Perhaps his stay in Uppsala instilled a dramatic sense of Nordic history in Bergman (Cowie, 1982: 21).

In 1930 he first saw Alf Sjöberg's production of Swedish fairy tale *Big Klas and Little Klas* which inspired him to make his own puppet theatre. Later, Bergman made *The Virgin Spring* based on a thirteenth-century Swedish folksong, telling a sad but mystic tale. It is a film with powerful moments of primal instincts, the irony of fate and deep religious mysticism. These elements

were already present in the original story; nevertheless Bergman gave them his own distinctive treatment. The music of Swedish folk culture has a long heritage and Bergman effectively used folk tunes in his productions with medieval settings, both in theatre and cinema. His stage production of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and films like *The Seventh Seal* are appropriate examples. As Nordic history has always interested Bergman, the idea to produce a true story about a Norwegian man Peer Gynt, who lived in between the late 18th and early 19th century, appealed to him. Bergman used various elements of folk culture, like a nomadic actor troupe in *The Seventh Seal* and the travelling magician-cum-psychic and his group in *The Magician*.

Albertus Pictor was probably the most celebrated church painter in Sweden in the late medieval era. Pictor often portrayed Death in many of his murals, as a vengeful but engaging character. Most noteworthy of these is a fresco at Täby church in Sweden in which we see personified Death playing chess. This painting inspired the famous chess-playing motif in *The Seventh Seal*. Before the commencement of the play *Wood Painting*, Bergman used to announce that a twelve feet-wide mural in the vestibule of a church in Southern Småland, depicting the depredations of the plague, was the direct inspiration behind this play (Cowie, 1982: 137), which again, is the basis of *The Seventh Seal*. Bergman paid homage to Pictor by putting a painter character, working on a church fresco, in the film in a dialogue with the Knight's squire. Hence, we find that apart from the major high-culture literary influence, Bergman had considerable exposure to the Nordic folk culture, local sagas and history and that often influenced his art.

Chapter 3

Family, Religion and Feminism: Scandinavian Social Culture and Bergman's Work

3.1 Religion and Family: Their Effect on the Rebel Named Bergman

"... Protestantism is a wretched kettle of fish."

~ Bergman in an interview with Stig Bjorkman, 1968-70

"I will be a great director! I *want* to be!"

~ Bergman, as remembered by an acquaintance Kerstin Högvall
in his University days, Cowie, 1982

Religion, throughout Europe and throughout the ages, has held a very strong position in dictating the terms of the society. The traditions and often the radical transformation of Christian social values that came with Protestantism and Puritanism evolved very markedly in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Born into the family of a Swedish pastor in the 1910s, complex religious influences were inevitable on Bergman's life. During the 1920s, Sweden was suffering from severe unemployment, strikes, epidemics and poverty. As a religious Protestant family, his family lived an austere life and perhaps wanted to act as an example of an 'ideal' religious and contented family. But the reality seems to have been different. In his autobiography Bergman described his jealousy towards, and eventual emotional distancing from, his brother, his father's severe depression, his parent's violent quarrels and an extra-marital

affair of his mother, none of which stood up to the morals his family wanted to press on him. Regarding children's position in the Swedish society, Bergman commented in an interview that during his childhood, children did not have any freedom. The social structure was like a pyramid - with God at the top, then parents and then the teachers. Children were treated with kind of aloof discipline that lacked the familial warmth that other Christian traditions encouraged more (TV programme: Bergman in Cavett interview). Bergman's parents were "decent people, if also prisoners of their class and their beliefs" (Cowie, 1982: 5) and Bergman grew up to have a contradictory position as regards his family as he loathed the "iron caskets of duty" (Bergman cited in Cowie, 1982: 17). He left his parents' house at the age of nineteen and did not communicate with them for many years. The cold treatment, the ritual of punishments, the long list of taboos in his upbringing left their marks embedded in his work. Only in later years, did an elderly Bergman expressed his gratitude to his parents for teaching him punctuality, efficiency and a sense of financial responsibility, which are part of "bourgeois" practice, very much influenced or even formed by Protestant traditions, but nevertheless "important to an artist" (Cowie, 1982: 19).

Bergman recalled that he drew inspiration from his father's sermons while conceiving *The Seventh Seal* (Bergman official website). The title itself makes reference to Revelations 8:12. In *Persona*, we see Elizabeth's son draws a mental picture of her when she is absent and he wants to be close to her, but Elizabeth is rather indifferent to him, at least outwardly. It reminds me of Bergman's own account of childhood; his "doglike devotion" to his mother as

he wanted her attention but didn't get it (Bergman, 1988, 3). Cowie observed that Bergman's parents never showed any feelings while punishing them. They maintained an utter objectivity as regards punishment so that their own repressed frustration should not emerge in front of their children. No wonder Bergman's villains are stone faced, devoid of feelings (1982: 6). Bergman's traumatic childhood memory and terror of being locked up in a closet came back verbatim as the memory of Johan in *Hour of the Wolf*, where he mentions the fear of an unknown creature inside the cupboard, trying to gnaw at his toe. Apparently contented families hiding repressed misery also constituted the basis of many of his films, most noteworthy being *Scenes from a Marriage*. The troubled relationships in his films are shadows of Bergman's parents' life as well as his own personal life. Bergman had numerous muses outside his marriages. All of his marriages (except the last one with Ingrid von Rosen) ended in disaster. Bergman remarked in his autobiography that the problematic marriage with his second wife Ellen Lundström and his conversation and confession to her about his affair with Gun Grut is the direct inspiration of the third part of *Scenes from a Marriage* (Bergman, 1988: 164).

I mentioned already that his grandmother was the only family-member with whom he felt the closest. During his stay in Uppsala, young Bergman went to watch films with his grandmother and also every night used to discuss almost any topic under the sun. It was her who encouraged him to think and speak out about the world, life and death, "which was occupying my thoughts a good deal at the time" (Bergman, 1988:24). "She listened carefully, saw through my fibs or brushed them aside with friendly irony" (1988:24). With her, he felt like

"a real person" in his own right, "without camouflage" (Cowie, 1982: 22). They read aloud to each other and invented ghost or other horror stories. Interestingly, Bergman and his grandmother used to draw people and their activities, like in a series. The characters, activities and motivations were elaborated upon in small texts beside the drawings, perhaps an embryonic attempt at the art of storyboarding of a film.

In spite of being part of a devoted Christian Swedish society, young Bergman found trouble in understanding the concept of God as he struggled to believe in an omnipresent divinity, a phenomenon that of course can affect all believers from a monotheistic society, but clearly one that came with greater emphasis as a result of the austere reformations associated with Protestantism. The existential crisis and severe religious doubt tore him apart for a long time and that is obviously and strongly reflected in his works of the 1950s and 1960s, most noteworthy being the famous *Silence of God* trilogy, along with *The Seventh Seal* and *The Virgin Spring*. In *The Virgin Spring* there is mention of faith in miracle, biblical primal instincts like sibling-jealousy, and stern religious practices like self-punishment. The three films belonging to the *Silence of God* trilogy depict the deep spiritual crisis regarding the absence of a divine power and how the characters deal with the torment of helplessness born from the lack of faith. The stern "Nordic sage" (Elsaesser, 1998: 39) most definitely expressed his inner anguish and questions through his productions.

Because Bergman's films often questioned the whole point of Puritan Christianity and its austere ethics and symbolism, in later times they were

sometimes interpreted as pro-Catholic. Being an agnostic, Bergman denied such an interpretation; in an interview he clearly remarked "I've never been much smitten by Catholicism. I've never been committed to any religious dogma of any sort. ... For years the Catholics had me on their blacklist. Then along comes some sharp-witted pater and says 'Let's take this lad into the business, instead.' And I've been plagued by Catholic interpretations ever since. ...I've never felt any attraction to Catholicism" (Bergman cited in Bjorkman, Manns and Sima, 1993). He also mentioned in this aforesaid interview that he is "not at all" conscious about Catholic implications in *Wild Strawberries*. However, all these statements made in this interview by Bergman are later identified as "humorous" by Marc Gervais as he insists that "...on more than one occasion Bergman has expressed his relative admiration for a number of things Catholic. He was fully aware of the immense enthusiasm generated in catholic intellectual circles by *The Seventh Seal* and what followed during the 'metaphysical period' " (Gervais, 1999: 144). Also, much later, Arthur Rosman remarks as regards some dialogues of *Private Confessions* (1996), "Bergman points to something here that's central to a Catholic way of approaching God: the mystery of human holiness." (Rosman, 2013). Nevertheless, I believe his works on religious themes are mostly about his tremendous doubt about the concept of God and divinity in general, which is influenced by his familial Protestant background; it has hardly anything to do with Catholicism specifically. But then again, his work is open to interpretation.

In the early phase of his career, Bergman was working for the theatre Mäster Olofsgården, a settlement house built in Stockholm. There his choice of plays was dictated by the theatre authority; they preferred plays with subjects which are "uplifting and suitably idealistic for young people" (Steene, 1998: 191). The reason is that the theatre was situated within Christian premise and hence the authority dared not cross certain religious restrictions regarding the subject of a play; anything bleak or sexually intriguing could not be staged. We can say that during his brief career there, Bergman's creative decisions were limited with these religious regulations and that in turn gave him the chance to stage there the plays of his favourite Strindberg which are relatively lighter and less-known, like *Lucky Per's Journey*, fairytale *Swanwhite*, and the chamber-play *The Black Glove*.

3.2 Politics, Class and Feminism: Subtle Motivations

In the summer of 1934, almost two thousand Swedish teenagers went to Germany in a cultural exchange programme; teenager Bergman was one of them. There he was subjected to indoctrination about Hitler's 'noble' causes and he returned almost as a pro-Nazi. Later when he understood the subtle brainwashing he had undergone, it made him turn away from politics in any form; he did not vote for years and never made any political remark even in a friendly gathering (Cowie, 1982: 15-16). His films are also an expression of this political celibacy and hardly have any overt political message to deliver. If there is a 'politics' in his films they are not concerned with parties, political systems or ideology but the ethics of close social relations

If we look at films like *Persona*, *The Silence* and *Cries and Whispers* beyond their psychological realism, we find some social aspects which Bergman treats with subtlety, that is, rarely there to make a 'statement'. Firstly, in *Persona* we find the 'class' division of Sweden: the actress Elizabeth is a representative of elite celebrities in upper-class Sweden whereas Alma the nurse is more of a lower-middle class, less cultured, less educated. Their 'friendship' ends in distrust and violence. Finally, Elisabeth maintains her 'celebrity' status and Alma simply heads back to the city. Although Alma desires the actress's persona and her lifestyle, at the end of the day, it is not something she would be able to achieve and it remains that way. The class division is apparent in *The Magician* as well, where the travelling magician troupe is looked down upon and treated with disrespect as they are served food in the kitchen with maids, cooks and servants.

According to Cresswell and Karimova, the dramas of Bergman have often shown women to be involved in the clash of egos and personalities, miscommunication and misunderstanding, all within the closed labyrinth of a chamber. This can be depicted as 'chamber-politics'. *Shame*, *The Silence*, *Persona*, *Cries and Whispers* and *Autumn Sonata* show such tendency. Bergman quite clearly pointed out that he did not have any political passion of any kind (Bjorkman, Manns and Sima, 1993: 13). However, like other intellectuals of Scandinavia, he was not unaware of world politics of the 1960s. Cresswell and Karimova press on the fact that in some of Bergman's chamber-dramas we find a bigger political picture other than the 'chamber-politics',

beyond the chamber, even if for a while only. In *Persona*, in an isolated patients' cabin, Elizabeth watches TV and the very famous film footage of the self-immolation event of Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Quang Duc is telecasted. Cresswell and Karimova say that it is consciously included to give us a peep-view to the world and reality and in contrast to bring emphasis on Elizabeth whose performance of a 'mute', 'patient' was an activity too self-centred, rather bourgeois. (Cresswell and Karimova, 2011). In *Winter Light* we come to know about the tremendous, almost obsessive fear which Jonas suffers from, after reading about invading foreign forces in the newspaper; this is yet another example of a peep-view to the politics of the outer world.

Among Bergman's films, perhaps only *Shame* has a relatively strong socio-political theme, though the theme is played out in a highly abstracted social context. In an interview Bergman said that *Shame* originated "in a panicky question, 'How would I have behaved during the Nazi period if Sweden had been occupied and if I'd held some position of responsibility or been connected with some institutions?' " (Bergman cited in Cowie, 1982: 251). It focuses on the horror of war, the collateral damage by the clash of two war-hungry sides, wrongdoing of media and biased propaganda. We see how clear thinking becomes tough in such a bewildering situation, how human nature can change and how relationships take brutal turns. We see two helpless artists suffering an apocalypse caused by not God, but mankind itself. Kalin comments that the political terror was distant in *Winter Light* in the form of the news read by Johan and in *Persona* as TV news watched by Elizabeth; in *Shame* it is real

and at hand (2003: 111). The film is "not about bomb falling as much as the gradual infiltration of fear" (Bergman cited in Cowie, 1982: 251).

However, as Bergom-Larsson points out, there is certain vagueness in Bergman's statement about society and political system; *which* political system that is compromised is not clarified and his view is restricted in a kind of 'bourgeois' perception. His films address the society issues from a *class-perspective* and hence his characters are enclosed in an internal world (1978: 8). Even in *Shame* we see an isolated landscape, familiar to us since *Through a Glass Darkly*. Hence we can say that even if Bergman was influenced with the world-events, it does not reflect in his films directly. The reason is again rooted back to his upbringing in a traditional Puritan society and the introvert Scandinavian artistic disposition (intentionally or not), following the heritage of Strindberg, Pär Lagerkvist and Edvard Munch.

The wave of feminism and equal rights surged during the beginning of the twentieth century in Scandinavia and Germany. Sweden, Norway and Denmark were and still are leading nations to institute equal rights to women irrespective of their occupation, especially as regards their individual rights to be, act and make their own personal and legal decisions about life. It has been argued that this surge of gender equality is a continuation of an old heritage of Scandinavian countries going back to the 1873 (Fehr, Rosenbeck and Jónasdóttir, 1998: 28) when the Organization for Married Women's Right to Private Property was founded in Sweden. In 1880s and 1890 leading Swedish social democrats derived their ideas on equalities between sexes (Fehr,

Rosenbeck and Jónasdóttir, 1998: 24). Scandinavian Intellectuals like Ibsen contributed to the movement of women's cause by writing *The Pillars of Society* and *A Doll's House*. In 1907 Norwegian women got the voting rights (Wikipedia); which is much before the rest of Europe; Swedish women won that right in 1921 (Fehr, Rosenbeck and Jónasdóttir, 1998: 29). Two significant laws were passed in Norway in 1890. By the first law, married women gained majority status. The second law ended the authority of the husband over the wife. The principle of equal pay and the right to access all jobs to in the government was established by the 1920s (Wikipedia).

Alongside this freedom, comes contradiction or tensions especially regarding sexuality. Sweden has become a land of allure to the rest of the world, full of beautiful girls who are, as seen and imagined by the rest of the world, seductive and sexually liberated. Apart from the bleak depictions of doubt and depression of Bergman's films, the graphic sexual jealousy and sexual violence (in *The Virgin Spring*), a woman's strikingly uninhibited masturbation (in *The Silence*) or titillating sexual appeal (in *Summer with Monika* (1953)) were defined as 'adult cinema' in America in an age prior to the sexual revolution (Elsaesser, 1998: 51). So his *Summer Interlude* (1951) became *Illicit Interlude* and *Summer with Monika* became *Monika, the Story of a Bad Girl* in the film-posters distributed in the USA. The New York Post published an ad for *Persona*, which says: "Ingmar Bergman has followed the Swedish freedom into the exploration of sex". Similarly, for *The Silence*, a review of New York Post reads: "Bergman at his most powerful! A sexual frankness that blazes a new trail" (Holmberg, 2012). Somehow Bergman became the king of an 'adult'

art cinema, and at a time when one side of European 'art' cinema was seen as, and often overtly marketed as, pushing boundaries of the acceptably 'erotic' in cinema. In the 1950s and 1960s, Swedish erotica and Bergman's work became synonymous in the USA and elsewhere. Therefore, as regards the rights, freedom and openness of women in Sweden, contradictions and tensions abound. Clearly, Bergman was not concerned about making some spurious erotica and titillation or any overt 'exploitation' of women, their bodies and sexuality, though it is always possible to dispute this. But sexual 'freedom' or equality always comes with the contradictions of desire and then a condemnation of the very fact of that desire. These tensions can again be related to a Protestant culture that both value an austere and individual-based ethic and the freedom of choice and equality that is *necessary* to that ethic.

Chapter 4

The Women, Space and Sound of Bergman's Moving Images: The Nordic Effect

As I have discussed the external factors of Scandinavian culture which have had their influence on him, this chapter will concentrate on summarising the effect they had on his women, space and acoustics.

4.1 The Women and Society of Bergman

If we consult international OECD surveys of recent years, (OECD website), we can see that even in the last 10 years, the countries in the Nordic region are always among the top five positions regarding women's employment rate and job satisfaction. Denmark holds the highest number of women public sector officers; nearly 80 percent of Swedish mothers are working women and the parliaments of Scandinavian countries have a significantly high percentage of women members (Dahlerup, 2003). Often art becomes the mirror of society; hence women's portrayal in Scandinavian popular culture is also influenced by their social position. Bergman's women are complex, often sexually liberated, are featured in intense, 'honest' relationships with both men and other women, and they are somehow strong and vulnerable at the same time and hence perceived as more 'real', rather than as 'icons', stereotypes, sex symbols, and so on, despite the attempts of crude marketing, whenever it is allowed to have

influence. Of course when it comes to discussions of *any* representation of women (but especially by a man) there will be disagreements and critiques.

Films like *Persona* and *Cries and Whispers* are evidently 'women's films' as they deal with an almost head-on confrontation between the lead women characters in a closed chamber drama. The male characters share very little screen space and are, honestly, not important enough in the narrative. We have often found the men of Bergman as alter-ego characters — self-centred, confused and torn apart by spiritual uncertainty and existential crisis. Also, he often took the male-centric narratives from theatre: Borg of *Wild Strawberries* is a character taken from *A Dream Play*, the knight of *The Seventh Seal* is a fantastic concoction of the protagonists of his medieval plays and his tormented self, Tomas in *Winter Light* is simply Bergman questioning the whole point of divinity. In *Shame*, *Scenes from a Marriage* or *Passion of Anna*, Jan, Johan and Andreas are images of Bergman himself in various phases of his life. As already mentioned, the powerful on-screen depiction of human communication and understanding (or most of the time the lack of these) in his films are mostly the result of the experiences from the actual numerous relationships he had in his life.

On the other hand, the women of Bergman are not similar to any particular theatre character. Nor do we find any character to match with any woman in Bergman's life, which is paradoxical as many women who were the lead faces in his films were part of his intimate personal life. But I would still argue this, as I do not identify anyone in his film who is like Liv Ullman or Harriet

Anderssen or Ingrid Thulin in real life. In Bergman's early works in the 1940s, the women characters are pretty much one-dimensional and lack character development. In some films of the 1960s we often find men who do not understand women and their love -- in whatever form it is (example: *Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light*, *Scenes from a Marriage*, *Passion of Anna*). Perhaps Bergman was more immersed into portraying his own inner self, rather than portraying the women. Nevertheless, I cannot find Ullman the actual woman in his work, but through Ullman's acting I find so many women who emerge from Bergman's narratives: the high-class woman who has the luxury of withdrawal from reality as in Elizabeth Vogler of *Persona*, a lively but not trustworthy lover as Anna in *The Passion of Anna*, a sensitive, almost vulnerable but open- to-experience Eva in *Shame* and an unfaithful wife and insensitive sister without much depth of character in *Cries and Whispers*. In *Scenes From a Marriage*, through Ullman, a modern, simple, working mother Marianne comes to life, who is "free of Bergman's habitual personality traits" (Cowie, 1982: 285). The only example which contradicts my hypothesis to some extent is *Autumn Sonata*, where the character development and depiction of relationship of Ingrid Bergman and Liv Ullman is parallel to Ingrid Bergman's troubled family life and Ullman's strained relationship with her family members. Bergman is one of the pioneer European directors who distinctly and accurately portrayed women's psyche onscreen. The women in his films are not anyone specific, but are more like a synthesis of all the women who came, went and stayed in Bergman's life.

Bergom-Larsson says that in Bergman's view of men and women and in addressing the issues of paternal authority, again an influence of a Bourgeois family structure is evident (1978: 112). I believe that often his depictions of women in his films of the 1950s and 1960s give a sense of his desperation of breaking out of this orthodox influence. By the acts of sexual liberation, defying the idea of the divine, freeing themselves of family bonds -- in most of the Bergman films, while his men are questioning holiness sitting in their mental labyrinth, his women are trying to find the meaning of their existence in the real world.

4.2 The 'Bergmanian' Space

It is possible to find three distinct phases in Bergman's mise-en-scène from the 1950s to 1970s. Bergman's celebrated films of the 1950s (*The Seventh Seal*, *Wild Strawberries* and *The Virgin Spring*) are set in a natural environment. There is a "constant interaction and communication between the characters and natural surroundings" (Kovács,2007: 163). The themes of the films are inspired by theatre as we discussed before but the backdrop is not 'theatrical'; rather there is a tendency to choose the location in the lap of the nature. *The Seventh Seal* shows us a journey in various natural backdrops like by water, forests, villages and natural pathways, with many people and mystical creatures. *Wild Strawberries* reminds us of memories and dreams associated with the physicality of nature. *The Virgin Spring* compares the youthfulness and innocence of natural surroundings and the girl and the viciousness of the

criminals and the bad weather, and again how God shows his miracle through nature.

But then in the 1960s, an austere, bare landscape entered Bergman's cinematic composition. We have precursors of these austere landscapes in *The Seventh Seal*, but *Through the Glass Darkly* first lets us actually enter the emptiness of Fårö Island, which becomes his key iconographic space. He had reluctantly come to Fårö Island in 1960 to find a location for *Through a Glass Darkly*. That visit left a deep impression. Since then, he shot seven films on that island and lived a considerable amount of his time there. The wrecked ship, big rocks and seascape fills the atmosphere of the narrative with a sense of desolation. This is certainly "a projection of the characters' state of mind" (Kovács, 2007: 165).

Then yet another subtle change came in Bergman's filmic space in the late 1960s as it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between the inner and the outer world. The walls press in, the tension and the space surrounding the characters became synonymous. Probably the most suitable examples of this type of experiment with space are *Persona*, *The Silence*, *Hour of the Wolf* and *The Rite*. The last one, perhaps, does not fall among Bergman's masterpieces, yet this television film has some distinct characteristics regarding the expressionist minimalism. The locations are only a hotel room, a bar, etc. and a little furniture contributing to establish that location (Kovács, 2007: 162), thus producing a claustrophobic closed space and images of extreme close-ups. This also demonstrates the influence of Bergman's theatre-practice: the closed

chamber plays of Strindberg as well as the naked stage set-up of Ibsen's plays (as discussed in Chapter 2). In the 1970s, we find a relatively familiar set-up again, like that of the 1950s. In *Cries and Whispers* and *Autumn Sonata* we find details of nice house interiors as well as a garden-view (Kovacs, 2007: 164).

In Bergman's memoir, he recalled a very early memory as an assembly of visual images like "...the damp chafing clothes, the soft glow of the nightlight, the door into the next room just ajar, the nursemaid's deep breathing, pattering steps, whispering voices, reflections of the sun in the carafe of water" (Bergman, 1988: 1). The mode of his description evokes the visual composition of some of his movies of the 1950s and 1960s. Even without exploring the psychoanalytic aspect, we can say some imagery of Bergman's infant recollection is hidden within his oeuvre. Nevertheless, this is more about Bergman's personal memory than any distinct Scandinavian influence, as personalities like O'Neil, Fellini and Munch also were "susceptible to the fantasies that germinate at will" in their childhood (Cowie, 1982: 3).

4.3 The Melody and the Absence of it – The Acoustics of Bergman

"Both affect our emotions directly, not via the intellect. And film is mainly rhythm; it is inhalation and exhalation in continuous sequence."

~ Bergman on association of film and music, Cowie, 1982: 327

Scandinavia's music is mainly famous for its unique Swedish and Nordic folk tunes, choral music, and the influence of folk music on classical composers such as Grieg, Sibelius and Nielsen, all of whom also evoke a sense of

Scandinavian landscape through their works. Bergman was introduced to various kind of music in an early age. His father played piano and many family friends were adept on violin and cello. So a music gathering often took place in their house. In his youth he was impressed with the opera *Tannhäuser* by Richard Wagner and tried his hand in piano in his grandmother's house (Cowie, 1982: 14-15).

It is rhetorical to comment that music helps to emphasise the mood of a scene in a film. Once, in reply to the question of an audience that what he believed in, Bergman replied, "I believe in other worlds, other realities. But my prophets are Bach and Beethoven; they definitely show another world" (Bergman cited in Jenkins, 2006). He admitted on many occasions that works of Johann Sebastian Bach were most important to him, both in his anguished moments of severe crisis and also to appropriately express the theme behind most of his films. In many of his films, for example *Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light*, *Cries and Whispers* and *Autumn Sonata*, Bach is Bergman's prominent composer.

Once after bearing a terrible family-tragedy, Bach wrote in his diary, "Dear Lord, may my joy not leave me." Bergman commented that all through his conscious life, he has lived with what Bach calls his joy (1988: 43). He also recalled that once he was listening to Bach's Christmas Oratorio in Hedvig Eleonora Church, and he realised that "Bach's 'piety' heals the torment of our faithlessness" (Bergman cited in Bird, 2014). It can be said that often people like Bergman can lack religious belief but find something close to a religious

or spiritual sensibility in the music of someone like Bach that they cannot find in mere rituals, or rather the actual religion or beliefs themselves that inspired the music. This again indicates the religious crisis and dilemma which is the nucleus of most of his films.

Other classical music composers were constant sources of inspiration as well. As so often with Bergman, the idea of *Winter Light* came from a piece of music. One day Stravinsky's 'Symphony of Psalms' was played on the radio and while listening to it he decided to make a film set in a solitary rural church. Bergman has mentioned Carl Orff's choral work 'Carmina Burana', based on medieval songs by itinerant musicians drifting around Europe at the time of the plagues and great wars. "What attracted me was the whole idea of people travelling through the downfall of civilization and culture, bringing birth to new songs" (Bergman official website). One day while listening to the final and climactic movement of 'Carmina Burana', it struck him as the theme for his next film, *The Seventh Seal*. Also, thematically, Bergman said that *The Silence* "grew out" of Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra: "the dull continuous note, and then the sudden explosion" (Bergman cited in Cowie, 1982: 211).

However, being a devotee of classical music did not make him aloof to other kinds of acoustics. Classical music in theatre is a traditional practice and he used that in his stage endeavours. But in his stage-adaptation of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, which was produced previously by numerous renowned theatre directors, Bergman broke the age-old tradition of playing orchestral music in it and the musical accompaniment was limited to the barest minimum. Solveig's song

was sung to a simple Norwegian folk tune, and a simple drumbeat accompanied Ingrid Thulin's character's dance (Marker and Marker, 1992: 186). *The Seventh Seal* contains many folk songs: the squire of the knight sings loudly, much to the displeasure of his master; Mia sings folk songs and Jof strums lyre. The lyrics of all these songs were written by the director himself.

Having discussed the use of classical music and the inspiration of folk song in some of his films it is clear and needs remembering that Bergman hardly ever uses an extensive musical track on his films, thus partly establishing a tendency that marks European art cinema, though not all of it, in which directors will often wait for a key moment to use just a fragment of classical music and it is remarkable how many times Bach's music, especially, is used in such a way.

Beyond this use of music, Bergman's movies are brilliant in the sense of silence and minimal sound usage. Regarding the importance of silence, a rather funny anecdote would not be out of the place. While working and thinking, Bergman appreciated silence so much that he erected a huge board inside the theatres where he worked. The board contained the phrase 'shut up!' in ninety-seven different languages (Cowie, 1982: 155). In *The Magician*, just a monotonic guitar-strumming as the background score contributes to emphasise the nomadic nature of the travelling magician's troupe. In *The Silence* the mood of unease in the long train journey is created with only the sound of a clock ticking. In the opening credits of *Shame*, we hear no music, but it is replaced with the cacophonous noise of the radio "and the political rhetoric it

broadcasts" (Kalin, 2003: 112). In a defining moment of *Winter Light* – when Father Tomas stands alone by the river, in front of the body of Jonas – Bergman's brilliance is proved by only the roaring sound of the river and nothing else. It demonstrates that no stereotypical 'theme music' is really necessary, and such a use of 'theme music' is almost entirely absent from his films. *Persona* also contains some intense moments without any sound. The ubiquitous absence of music, or any sound at all, creates the most expressive atmosphere for some situations in Bergman movies. Apart from other aspects we can associate with this reticent use of music (of any sort) to art cinema like Bergman's works, we can also refer again to the more austere use of music in northern European Protestant traditions. Music can inspire, evoke an intense emotional response and affect the body in sensual ways but with that then come a careful use of its powers. Hence along with the Protestant heritage of austere use of music, the genius of sound design, Bach and silence are inseparable parts of Bergman's authorship.

Chapter 5

Being Bergman: The One-man Cultural Industry of Sweden

"He was the kind of artist we had been brought up to believe was the real deal:

He suffered for our souls."

~ Peter Rainer on Bergman, The Times, 2005

5.1 "I'm so 100 percent Swedish"

Bergman's relationship with his homeland was much like the dysfunctional marriages in his films, like an "explosive mixture of attraction and antagonism" (Holmberg, 2012). In late 1960s, the socio-political situation of Sweden became radically left-wing and Bergman suffered criticism as a high-brow bourgeois. In 1968 there was a cultural left-wing uprising; the activists were demanding that Royal Dramatic Theatre should be burnt to the ground and "Sjöberg and Bergman should be hanged from the Tornberg clock outside in Nybroplan" (Holmberg, 2012). In 1976, Bergman was arrested in the middle of a rehearsal at the Royal Dramatic Theatre and accused of tax evasion. It turned out that he was innocent but that deeply hampered his public image. Bergman suffered a nervous breakdown; he left Sweden and went to Germany for six years. He came back in 1982 but the relationship with his country was never very mellow. In spite of this tense situation, Bergman was *the* brand

name of Scandinavian culture, especially Sweden, as far as the rest of the world was concerned.

Bergman once commented about himself: "I am so 100 percent Swedish... Someone has said a Swede is like a bottle of ketchup — nothing and nothing and then all at once — splat. I think I'm a little like that" (Kakutani, 1983). Perhaps he maintained this very Swedish nature while communicating with his audience through his work when he contemplated that he did not want to produce a work of art that "the public can sit and suck aesthetically.... I want to give them a blow in the small of the back, to scorch their indifference, to startle them out of their complacency" (Bergman cited in Oliver, 2007).

The basic mood of Scandinavia is expressed through most of the literary heritage of the region that in turn came from the natural situation. In Scandinavia, people often face rogue bitter-cold weather and austere lifestyle, credit being given to the weather and to some extent religion. Cowie observes that in the villages people often stay in isolated farms and that physical isolation slowly gives rise to mental isolation and inability to communicate one's feelings. All of these give a certain sense of desolation and that, for ages, has established the notion of the Scandinavian mood: bleak and brooding. Now as discussed in Chapter 3, Bergman's films, exhibiting the existential crisis and religious anguish became an archetype of a certain kind of art cinema. Hence his films reflect this 'Scandinavian mood' as well. On the other hand, the explicit sexuality and provocative promotion of some of his films gained him the attention of mainstream audience. Also, his films were received by the

young European filmmakers and audiences worldwide as forerunners of a European art cinema revolution. Regarding the emergence of the French New Wave, once Jean Luc-Godard, in an article named 'Bergmanorama', wrote that the "...renaissance of the modern cinema had already been brought to its peak five years earlier by the son of a Swedish pastor. What were we dreaming of when *SUMMER WITH MONIKA* was first shown in Paris? Ingmar Bergman was already doing what we are still accusing French directors of not doing" (Godard cited in Elsaesser, 1998: 37). The enthusiasm of Godard regarding this film, which was according to Bergman himself was the least complicated film he ever made, is understandable if we look at it as a "hymn to a young woman's sensuality" (Elsaesser, 1998: 38) and take it as a delightful mix of pleasure and seriousness, which was quite new at that time. Also, Weightman praises Bergman's, even if unintentional, position, saying that, "In putting all these characters and moments of life on to the screen in so many brilliant, if fragmentary episodes, Bergman has done something for Sweden that no-one, to my knowledge, is doing for England.... two or three French directors, like Bergman have deliberately turned down attractive foreign offers ... to produce films that have a local, home-made or hand-made character" (Weightman cited in Elsaesser, 1998: 38-39). Thus borrowing from Elsaesser, I would like to say that Bergman, in the 1970s had matured into the "one-man cultural industry" of Scandinavia. Film, theatre, radio, TV, he left his mark everywhere: sometimes by himself, sometimes by collaborating with groups of actors, producers, cinematographers etc. who became associated with him.

Thus Bergman became a 'national' figure in Sweden. His attempts to make comedies in early 1950s (which were possibly inspired by his theatre-education of Molière and Shakespeare) were completely panned by critics and rejected by viewers. So Bergman had to signify a 'national cinema' with a recognisable high culture theme. He had to produce works, as Elsaesser comments, with a "stylistic expressivity amounting to a 'personal signature' and ambiguous 'psychological realism' " (1998: 53) and those serious films were loved by an international audience. So in one hand he portrayed the Swedish women as the tempting seductress, again some of his films, although perhaps not fully intentionally, almost advertised the stereotyped Scandinavian nature as dark and brooding. The third issue emerged from Bergman's national identity is that many Swedish filmmakers complained that "Bergman was taking the bread from the mouths of his poor Swedish colleagues although he could finance his films abroad" (Bergman, 1988: 228). Hence I believe Bergman had to comply with everything and everyone, with himself being a 'national figure', making apparently 'national' films and trying to keep a balance between what was his creative instinct and what was best for the audience's appetite as well as best for the Scandinavian culture industry.

5.2 Conclusion

This thesis has sought to show the many influences both personal and social of Scandinavian culture on Bergman's work but in addition his own influence, and the worldwide perceptions of it, has been so prominent that he and his work has also now fashioned a complex image of what Scandinavian culture

is. Sometimes the culture acted as the thematic basis, and sometimes it constituted his experience of life, love, various beliefs and interests, which sooner or later were included in the narratives in some structure and/or form. I have mentioned his theatrical experience and a few films prior to the s1950s, only to establish the fact that his artistic experiences of earlier years had its resonance in his golden era of films in the late 1950s to late 1960s as well.

Cowie rightly said that at the end of the day idols and mentors can show the way, but the artist has to progress in the path of creation alone (1982: 49). Thus Bergman's opus is the unique product of his dreams, curiosities and self-projections, as well as his upbringing and grooming as a Swedish intellectual, and most importantly his intertextual interest and the genius to translate and transform these inspirations into powerful moving images.

Filmography

The Phantom Carriage (1921, Sweden, dir. Victor Sjöström)

The Passion of Joan of Arc (1928, France, dir. Carl Theodor Dreyer)

Day of Wrath (1943, Denmark, dir. Carl Theodor Dreyer)

Torment/Frenzy (1944, Sweden, dir. Alf Sjöberg)

Summer Interlude (1952, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Waiting Women (1952, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Summer with Monika (1953, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Ordet (1955, Denmark, dir. Carl Theodor Dreyer)

Smiles of a Summer Night (1955, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Last Pair Out (1956, Sweden, dir. Alf Sjöberg)

The Seventh Seal (1957, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Wild Strawberries (1957, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

The Magician (1958, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

The Virgin Spring (1960, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Through a Glass Darkly (1961, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Winter Light (1963, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

The Silence (1963, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Persona (1966, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Shame (1968, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Hour of the Wolf (1968, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

The Rite (1969, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Passion of Anna (1969, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Cries and Whispers (1972, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Scenes from a Marriage (1973, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Autumn Sonata (1978, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

In the Presence of a Clown (1997, Sweden, dir. Ingmar Bergman)

Television Documentaries/ Programmes

A Conversation with Ingmar Bergman: The Dick Cavett Show (1971, USA, dir. David Barnhizer)

Ingmar Bergman on Victor Sjöström's The Phantom Carriage (Year and director - Unknown. Latest distribution by - The Shadowbox: Community Micro cinema)

Bergman Island (2004, Sweden, dir. Marie Nyreröd)

Trespassing Bergman (2013, Sweden, dir. Jane Magnusson, Hynek Pallas)

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